

VZCZCXRO6159
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #1833/01 1991533
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181533Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3019
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHMFISS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001833

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: ESKISEHIR AMBIVALENT TOWARD AKP

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY. Two and a half hours west of Ankara, the prosperous industrial city of Eskisehir, population 750,000, is preparing for elections with mixed feelings for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The home of dwindling reserves of soft Meerschaum mineral used for carving pipes and jewelry, Eskisehir is a comfortable and modern place, known as a Balkan and Crimean migrant town of earlier generations. END SUMMARY.

A City on the Move

[12](#). (U) Eskisehir (literally "Old City") is a small but wealthy city, with a striking diversity of modern architectural styles but a place of honor for the traditions of the past. Ottoman wooden houses downtown have been refurbished, painted bright colors, and will serve as guesthouses. Eskisehir's prosperity is evident from the flower beds and iron fence work along the Porsuk river, the city's brand-new tram, and pedestrian zones. Even the newspaper kiosk is a handsome iron grille-work structure that would be at home in Salzburg or Munich. Four theater stages, a symphony orchestra, an opera house, and numerous parks speak to the growing sophistication of Eskisehir's inhabitants. Eighty percent of the population of Eskisehir lives within the city boundaries.

[13](#). (U) The city is the industrial heart of an agricultural province. Hundreds of companies -- producing everything from high-end clothing and biscuits to engines for F-16s -- are already thriving, and industrial leaders are trying to attract high-tech and software companies. The Chamber of Industry (one of only a handful in Turkey) chairman is keen on his chamber's independence from the Chamber of Commerce, and its political independence. A two-university town, students bring liveliness and tolerance to Eskisehir, according to the vice rector of Anatolia University. His institution's reach penetrates the entire country; through its "Open University," Anatolia takes advantage of internet technology to expand a distance learning program it began over 30 years ago and make it available to huge numbers (current enrollment is over one million). Osman Gazi University, meanwhile, emphasizes high-tech subjects well-suited to the future aspirations of Eskisehir.

14. (SBU) The outlying regions of the province are agriculturally-oriented and make Eskisehir the sixth largest wheat-growing province in the country, according to the chairman of the Chamber of Agriculture. Sugar beets are also a top product. However, government-imposed quotas have reduced capacity to one-fifth, and producers are struggling to make ends meet. Twenty-five percent of farmland is irrigated in Eskisehir.

Election Preparations: Mixed Feelings for AKP

15. (C) Governor Kadir Calisici observed that active election campaigns are very civilized this time. He noted that most parties upheld a gentlemen's agreement that the governor designates areas for public propaganda. There has been no violence or vandalism associated with the campaigns. Currently 3 AKP deputies and 3 opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) deputies represent Eskisehir at the national level, but most contacts agreed that AKP is likely to lose a seat to the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Mayor Yilmaz Buyukersen, a rare Democratic Left Party (DSP) member -- widely credited with dramatic improvements in Eskisehir's infrastructure and appearance while squared off against an AKP-dominated municipal council -- asserted that the CHP-DSP merger had created a good synergy. He also decried AKP obstructionism and tricks. He claimed that Prime Minister Erdogan recently wanted to be the hero of the hour at the ribbon-cutting of a new industrial park in Eskisehir, but the site wasn't completed; AKP organized a ribbon-cutting just the same, and it looked good on television -- but Eskisehir residents knew that it was the old industrial park being "opened."

ANKARA 00001833 002 OF 002

16. (C) We repeatedly heard (from non-AKP sources) that Eskisehir son AKP deputy Murat Mercan is intensely disliked for his role in obstructing development projects and investment. Mercan is AKP's second-row candidate, behind the imported Finance Minister Unakitan. Chamber of Industry chairman, Savas Ozaydemir, fresh from his meeting with Democrat Party (DP) chairman Mehmet Agar, boasted that he had demanded that Eskisehir be represented by a minister, and three parties -- AKP, CHP, and Genc -- had produced ministers or former ministers as their first-row candidates, a signal of the importance they attach to the province.

17. (C) AKP does not appear as popular in Eskisehir as in 2002, when it won 29 percent of the vote, but the problems seem locally-focused; some community leaders were sanguine about the alleged threat the party poses. The vice rector of Anatolia University was "not concerned at all" about AKP; "they couldn't change the High Education Council (YOK), so could they really change Turkey?" (The vice rector reserved his stronger criticism for YOK, which cherry-picks political issues on which to take a stand.) Chamber of Industry complained about the failure of AKP to revise its economic policy in the past year, but acknowledged that they had done a good job overall and that, despite the chairman's own unspecified political preferences, the best thing for Eskisehir's industry would be an AKP single-party government. He also claimed to be utterly unconcerned about an independent Kurdistan, "unless they demand Turkish lands," and then "every single Eskisehir resident would head to the southeast" to put an end to such pursuits.

18. (SBU) The Chamber of Agriculture chairman, Ibrahim Cetinkaya, criticized the fact that there are no farmer-parliamentarians, and said now 30 farmers nationwide were included on the party lists of AKP, CHP, and DP. He was not optimistic that any would find a seat in parliament on July 22; "maybe next time." He criticized the AKP for acting "like the government of the EU, not Turkey."

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON